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ABSTRACT

Sixth grade students can use cinquain poems to explore language, learn grammar, and write creatively. Before learning about cinquains, students should be introduced to simpler poetic forms. To introduce cinquains, the teacher writes a simple example on the board and has the students informally figure out the parts of speech and grammatical function of each line of the poem. The teacher then writes the rules of cinquain formation on the board, and the class creates a group cinquain with no help from the teacher. Next, individual students "cluster" terms related to a topic of their choice (for example, a student circled "pizza" on a piece of paper, then linked terms like "Italian," "yummy," and "bubbling" to the main term). Out of the clustering evolves the first draft of the cinquains, which each student brings to the teacher for an individual conference. The students revise their poems after the conference, then exchange them with a peer, who writes three comments which may or may not inspire further revision. Final copies are written on drawing paper and illustrated by the poets. The teacher displays or "publishes" them on a bulletin board. The activity helps students review grammar, learn a poetic form, practice following directions, and cooperate to share their feelings. (Five sample poems are appended.) (SKC)

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FIVE LINES FOR SIXTH GRADE

(A lesson model for teaching the writing of the cinquain poem
to sixth grade students.)

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FIVE LINES FOR SIXTH GRADE

Harold chews his pencil. Yady talks to herself as she writes each line. Erika carefully copies her final draft into her journal. What are these sixth grade children doing? They are writing poetry. As a teacher of below grade level language arts, I find poetry to be a unique activity through which students can explore language, learn grammar, and write creatively.

On this particular day, the goal of my class is to discover what makes up a cinquain poem and to write one. Leading up to this activity, the students had written couplets, quatrains, alliteration poems, and listed rhyming words. They had also read and shared many different poems to see that poetry does not always have to rhyme.

As a pre-writing activity, I place a simple informal cinquain on the board and read it outloud.

EXAMPLE:	Children
	Restless, curious
	Responding, reading, writing
	They work hard in Language Arts
	Students.

Then I ask the students what they observe about the poem, especially the first line. Yady answers, "It doesn't rhyme." Another replies, "The first word is a noun." Andrea adds, "It's a plural noun!"

"Right!" I respond, "The first rule for an informal cinquain is to choose a noun-word or a word which names the subject about which you are going to write. What do the next three words have in common? Here is a hint: they are all the same part of speech."

Bernadette too quickly answers, "Adverb!" But, through some coaching from her peers, finally concedes that each of the words is an adjective.

"What do you think the adjectives are describing?"

"Us!" chirps Erika.

"And you are.....?"

"Children!!!!" they all chime at once.

"Right, the next rule for an informal cinquain is to write two adjectives which describe the first noun. What about the next line with its three words?"

"I-n-g words!"

"You've got it!" Before I can ask the next obvious question, Harold pipes up, "And they describe us, too."

"O.K., Harold, the next rule of an informal cinquain is to write three i-n-g words which describe your noun. These i-n-g words, if you remember, are called participles and act like adjectives. Now, the fourth line is different from the others we have looked at. What do you see here?"

Bernadette noticed immediately that the line was written as a complete sentence.

"Good," I respond, "the fourth line is a sentence which tells something more about your noun."

We have a little more difficulty discerning the identity of the last line. Some students say it is "just a noun" but others begin to relate the word "Students" to themselves. I help a bit with the final riddle. "You are not only children in the classroom, but you are also my?"

"Students!"

"That's it! The final line is a word that means the same as the noun in the first line. In this case, the two words are "Students" and "Children."

"Then that's a cinnamon!" Julie exclaims.

"That's close, " I encourage, "But what is a syn-o-nym?" I ask over-pronouncing the word.

"A word that means the same as another," comes the response in unison. I sigh, delighted that last week's spelling term has been retained.

Then, on the board I write the rules that we have discovered together for writing the informal cinquain.

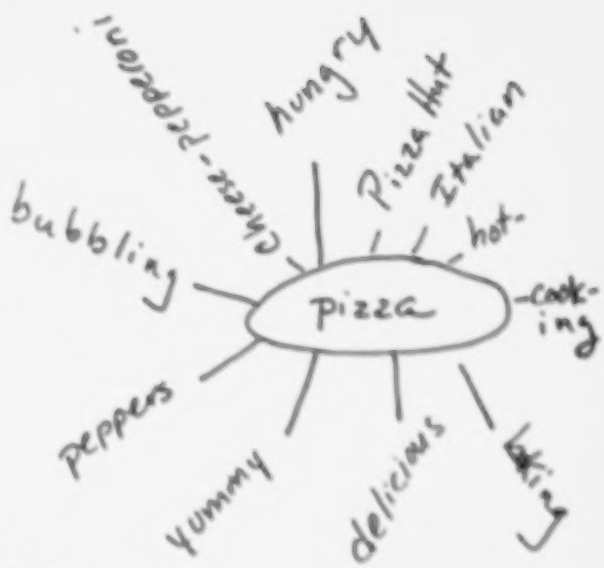
Line 1: Noun (the subject you will be talking about)
Line 2: Two adjectives
Line 3: Three Participles (i-n-g words)
Line 4: Write a sentence telling about your noun (subject)
Line 5: Write a synonym for your noun

Following this we write a group cinquain. The class chooses the subject of Ray Charles. Here is the result (with no help from me other than to write what they dictate to write into the poem).

RAY CHARLES

Ray Charles
Musical, talented
Playing, touching, singing
His music is beautiful.
All-American.

The children then "cluster" some ideas about a topic of their own individual choice. Here are some examples:



Out of this clustering evolves the first draft of their cinquains. These first drafts are brought individually to me, and as I read each one personally, the "poet" and I have a brief conference. For some of the cinquains I ask questions about word choices. ("Can you think of another word for 'got'?" or "What do you think a synonym for 'spring' might be?")

[Usually, I ask the child to read me the poem outloud. In that way, the student will proofread what he/she has written, and can make some corrections immediately. Many of my students think faster than they write, and often skip writing words they think are there; proofreading outloud catches these omissions. Besides, it is fun to hear them read their own work.]

After conferencing, I encourage students to revise their cinquains and write another. Following this, they exchange their poems with a peer-partner who writes three comments about what he likes best. If the poet choses to revise his work following the suggestions of his partner, he can. Otherwise, he can make a copy of his poem on a piece of drawing paper, and then appropriately illustrate his cinquain. Finished pictures and cinquains are posted on the bulletin board (published) for everyone to enjoy. Evaluation is based on completing a cinquain in the correct form, and drawing a picture to illustrate it. Of course, "A's" are awarded to all who complete the task. (I have to admit that I always write with my students and they award me my "A" for completing my poem, too.)

Through writing the cinquain, not only are my students able to review parts of speech, to learn a poetic form, and to discover new words; but also they are able to practice following directions, to cooperate together and share their feelings. In conclusion, I find the most rewarding aspect of writing poetry with my sixth grade class is that it allows them to play with language and to compose creatively in a fun, non-threatening atmosphere. The result overall is a poem and a picture which will last beyond five lines and sixth grade.

CINQUAIN POEMS OR FIVE LINES BY THE SIXTH GRADERS

Birds
Brown, small
Chirping, dancing, mating
Their eggs sit in their nests.
Flyers.

HAROLD JONES

WILLIAM PERRY

Refrigerator
Athletic, huge
Hitting, jumping, tackling
He's a good football player for the Bears.
Player.

CEPHAS MASON

Pizza
Hot, good
Baking, cooking, bubbling
It is delicious.
Pizza Hut.

ROGER DODSON

Squirrel
Cute, quick
Playing, jumping, climbing
He'd be a fun pet.
Mine.

YADY WILDS

Kittens
Furry, funny
Cunning, sleeping, playing
Kittens are mischievous.
Cuties.

ERIKA LAMP